

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

The present inventions provide an integrated, modular array of administrative and support services for electronic commerce and electronic rights and transaction management. These administrative and support services supply a secure foundation for conducting financial management, rights management, certificate authority, rules clearing, usage clearing, secure directory services, and other transaction related capabilities functioning over a vast electronic network such as the Internet and/or over organization internal Intranets.

These administrative and support services can be adapted to the specific needs of electronic commerce value chains. Electronic commerce participants can use these administrative and support services to support their interests, and can shape and reuse these services in response to competitive business realities.

A Distributed Commerce Utility having a secure, programmable, distributed architecture provides administrative and support services. The Distributed Commerce Utility makes optimally efficient use of commerce administration resources, and can scale in a practical fashion to accommodate the demands of electronic commerce growth.

The Distributed Commerce Utility may comprise a number of Commerce Utility Systems. These Commerce Utility Systems provide a web of infrastructure support available to, and reusable by, the entire electronic community and/or many or all of its participants.

- Different support functions can be collected together in hierarchical and/or in networked relationships to suit various business models and/or other objectives. Modular support functions can be combined in different arrays to form different Commerce Utility
- 5 Systems for different design implementations and purposes. These Commerce Utility Systems can be distributed across a large number of electronic appliances with varying degrees of distribution.